



Region One
490 N. Meridian Rd.
Kalispell, MT 59901
December 10, 2019

**Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact
for**

2019 Thompson Chain of Lakes Forest Management Project

Description of Proposed Action and Alternatives

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) Region One is proposing forest management treatments throughout the Thompson Chain of Lakes (TCL) complex, which includes Logan State Park.

The TCL complex provides public access to high quality waters for camping, boating, fishing, and other recreational opportunities. In addition, the complex is a popular area for swimming, hunting, ice fishing, wildlife viewing, hiking, birdwatching, picnicking, etc. The complex provides developed recreational facilities such as campsites, shower facilities, restrooms, parking areas and boat ramps, and is comprised of large areas of undeveloped forest land. FWP's 2018 Forest Management Plan¹ provides direction and guidance to the Parks Division for managing forest land for public use and recreational values. Public safety, aesthetics, and visual screening are key priorities for forest management in developed areas. Beyond developed areas, the priority focus is insect and disease management, fire hazard mitigation, fish and wildlife habitat, and other recreation opportunities.

The areas proposed for treatment include the campsites and developed areas throughout the TCL complex. The treatments would primarily involve the removal of conifer trees (both of merchantable and nonmerchantable value). The treatments would also be aimed at helping to mitigate hazard trees in developed areas. Hazard trees are trees that have strong potential to fail and cause injury to either people, property or facilities (i.e. campgrounds, boat ramps, trailhead parking, administrative sites, information centers, etc.) Additionally, treatments would help reduce hazardous fuels in the wildland urban interface (WUI) and increase resiliency to insects and diseases. For a detailed description of the proposed action, please see the narrative summary below.

Alternative A: No Action

Under this alternative, FWP would not conduct the proposed forest management activities under this alternative. The TCL complex forests would remain untreated, creating increased opportunities for continued bark beetle infestations within Douglas-fir stands. Forest succession and competition amongst trees for limited resources (nutrients, sunlight, and water) would continue, leading to decreased stand vigor and potential for trees and stands to be less resilient to stressors and damaging agents. Maintenance costs may increase over time as more trees die and increasingly pose threats to public safety, property, and improvement. Dead and downed fuels may increase, and as new trees regenerate in gaps created from overstory mortality, ladder fuels may also increase leading to increased hazardous fuel build up. Higher stand densities and increased dead and downed wood may increase habitat availability

for species that depend on that condition while potentially negatively affecting species that depend on more open stand conditions.

Alternative B:

Complete project to improve forest health at TCL. The TCL complex is experiencing decline of the Douglas-fir stands caused by root disease, root compaction, recreational use, drought, and bark beetle infestation. This project would help manage the current stands of Douglas-fir, by removing those trees that are deemed susceptible to bark beetle from their stressed conditions, and eventually western larch and ponderosa pine.

Following this action, FWP anticipates that hazard trees would be mitigated, tree vigor and resilience to insects and diseases would be improved, hazardous fuels in the wildland urban interface would be reduced, aesthetics would be improved, and the sale of timber may generate revenue for the FWP forest management account for future forestry projects.

Background

The TCL complex has experienced several decades of timber harvest under former private ownership. The property was acquired by FWP in the early 1990's to perpetuate pre-existing recreational use and has since been managed by the Parks Division.

The TCL complex provides 128 designated campsites and seven dispersed boat launching areas. Most of the complex is available for year-round use, and visitation has averaged approximately 112,000 visits per year for the past three years. Many of the developed amenities are located on or near lake shores. These areas contain mature Douglas-fir trees that are stressed by root disease or root compaction from decades of recreational use occurring around the sites.

Since acquiring the property, FWP has conducted several forestry projects throughout the TCL complex including: a four-phase 320-acre project around Crystal Lake, Middle Thompson and Upper Thompson Lakes in 2005, a 10-acre fuel reduction project at McGregor Lake in 2007, and another 390-acre forest health project at McGregor Lake in 2010. In all, FWP has conducted some type of forest management action on nearly 25% of the total 3,000 total acres.

The existing stands within the TCL complex proposed for treatment vary throughout the complex but can be characterized as being largely Douglas-fir with a dense understory. Root rot (*Armillaria*) single tree and clump infections are scattered throughout the complex. Douglas-fir bark beetle (DFBB) infestations occur in Douglas-fir throughout the complex. The beetle infestations are more noticeable near the recreation sites, where root compaction is a contributing factor in causing stress, which attracts DFBB to finish killing the individual trees. Recent periods of drought have also contributed to some of the observed mortality.

Public Comment and Montana Environmental Policy Act

FWP is required by the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) to assess significant potential impacts of a proposed action to the human and physical environments. In compliance with MEPA, an Environmental Assessment (EA) was completed for the project by FWP and released for public comment on October 9, 2019.

Summary of Public Comment

MEPA directs State to ensure the public is informed of and participates in the decision-making process. Public participation is not plebiscite, which measures how many people favor or oppose a proposal, but rather a mechanism for agencies to consider substantive comments.

- Public comments on the proposed project were accepted for 30 days between October 9, 2019 and November 9, 2019.

- Legal notices were published in Libby Western News, Kalispell Daily Interlake, and Helena Independent Record
- A news release was sent out on Thursday October 10, 2019
- Legal notice and draft EA posted on State Parks website at http://stateparks.mt.gov/news/publicNotices/environmental-assessments/pn_0098.html
- The draft EA was available at the Region 1 headquarters office in Kalispell, MT and at the FWP headquarters in Helena, MT.
- The link to view the EA was emailed to Lincoln County elected officials including commissioners

Public Response

Comments were collected from October 9 through November 9, 2019. Two written response were received as were five electronic emails, all supporting Alternative B to complete the project as indicated in the draft EA. Copies of the individual comments can be requested from the Region One FWP office by calling 751-4590.

General Comments

Two of the comments received addressed using woody debris for fish habitat and shoreline fish habitat.

The deposit of woody debris into TCL waters was not evaluated in this analysis and would require further review for consideration.

Decision

Based on the environmental assessment and public comment, FWP will implement alternative B of the draft EA.

Final Environmental Assessment

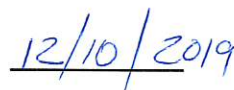
There are no modifications to the draft EA based on public comment. The draft EA along with this Decision Notice, will serve as the final document for this proposal. We have evaluated the EA, and applicable laws, regulations, and policies, and have determined that this action will not have a significant impact on the human and physical environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared.

The final EA can be viewed at or obtained from Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks, Region One, Kalispell, MT. Please direct request to FWP Region One parks Division office at 490 N. meridian Rd., Kalispell, MT 59901.

In accordance with FWP policy, an appeal can be made by any person who has either commented in writing to the department on the proposed project or who can provide new evidence that would otherwise change the proposed plan. An appeal must be submitted to the Director of FWP in writing and must be postmarked or received within 30 days of this Decision Notice. The appeal must describe the basis for the appeal, how the appellant previously commented to the Department or participated in the decision-making process, and how the Department can provide relief. The appeal should be mailed to: Director, Fish Wildlife, and Parks, 1420 East 6th avenue, Helena, MT 59620.



David Landstrom, Region 1 Park Manager



Date

